

2016

## Slut Pride: The Reappropriation Attempt by SlutWalk

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### Recommended Citation

Noe, Siena C. (2016) "Slut Pride: The Reappropriation Attempt by SlutWalk," *Quercus: Linfield Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/quercus/vol2/iss1/3>

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## Slut Pride: The Reappropriation Attempt by SlutWalk

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Brenda DeVore Marshall for her perpetual patience, guidance, and enthusiasm.

## SLUT PRIDE: THE REAPPROPRIATION ATTEMPT BY SLUTWALK

A slew of scantily clad women marching through the streets shouting obscenities like “Slut, slut! Ho, ho! Yes means yes! No means no!” may seem a little unusual especially if the women are known to hold “respectable” positions and lead otherwise “respectable” lives. So what exactly is going on? The first SlutWalk took place in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 2011, its idea conceived from feminist ideology and ignited by a comment made by Toronto Police officer, Constable Michael Sanguinetti. On January 24, 2011, he told a group of students at an Osgoode Hall Law School personal safety class, “I’ve been told I’m not supposed to say this. However, women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (Pilkington). The SlutWalk was held in response to this misguided statement of victim-blaming in which some blame the victims for their rape because of their attire rather than the rapists for their sexually violent and dehumanizing behavior toward their victims (“WHY”).

The SlutWalk served as a protest march against “rape culture” and its corresponding “slut-shaming” (sometimes called “slut-bashing”) and victim-blaming, which feminists argue are global phenomena. Since then, Heather Jarvis, cofounder of the Toronto SlutWalk, estimates roughly 120 similar SlutWalks (Aldrich) have happened around the world. According to Marshall University’s Women’s Center Website, rape culture refers to “an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women’s bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women’s rights and safety” (“Rape Culture”). Meanwhile slut-shaming is exactly what it sounds like; it refers to making a female feel guilty or inferior for engaging in any number of sexual behaviors or activities which are deemed inappropriate because of their lack of adherence to cultural gender norms. Slut-shaming refers to the act of making a girl or woman feel poorly about her expression of her sexuality under traditional patriarchal expectations. It is important to note that slut-shaming encompasses a whole body of derogatory terms for females, including but certainly not limited to “slut” (*tekanji*). “Ho,” “whore,” and even “bitch” carry many of the same connotations (Kleinman, Ezzell, and Frost 47). Many contemporary feminists believe rape culture is alive and well in the United States, perpetuated by enforcement of laws surrounding the sensitive issues of sexual violence.

Young girls and women have become increasingly hypersexualized in the United States media according to a study printed in the September 2011 *Sexuality & Culture* journal, which analyzed the content of *Rolling Stones* covers from

1967 to 2009. Hypersexualization refers to the accentuating of one's sexuality in such a way as to make it extraordinarily sexual. For the purposes of this study, it is referring to the sexual objectification of females in United States society, specifically as imposed on them through the media and marketing that encourages it.

An example of this hypersexualization is the marketing of Abercrombie & Fitch thongs to children and pre-teens with the wildly inappropriate sayings "eye candy" and "wink wink" embroidered on them. Another example is Bratz, a line of fashion dolls manufactured by MGA Entertainment. Their unhealthy disproportional body types aside, the dolls are dressed outrageously provocatively for their intended consumer audience of children and pre-teens. The hypersexualization of females continues well into their adolescence and adulthood as well as evidenced in any number of advertisements for everything from perfume to sports cars. Pop culture, too, helps very little with alleviating the hypersexualization. For a more current example, one might look at Miley Cyrus's VMA performance with Robin Thicke in which she demonstrates her "twerking" ability explicitly. There was public outrage over her "dancing" but such sexually driven moves are fairly commonplace in today's hit music videos.

Rape culture, despite hypersexualizing women, also subjects women to a vicious double standard regarding sexual promiscuity, which is where slut-shaming comes into play. According to Miriam:

Whatever choice of [self-]presentation is made by a woman, she will be punished . . . Women are both exhorted to self-present as sexy and yet are punished as sluts; failure to self-present as sexy is punished as prudish or lacking worth within a system that bases women's value and indeed very visibility— on competency in displaying sexual availability (aka 'sexiness') without falling into the 'slut' category (Miriam 263).

Rape culture necessarily maintains that women are expected to act a certain way sexually but do not hold men to the same standards. When a woman has multiple sexual partners, she is criticized and scorned by society. And even more egregiously, when a woman has an unwanted sexual partner such as in the case of rape, she is criticized and scorned by society as a "slut" for "asking for it." This lies at the heart of the SlutWalks' motivation. The participants of the SlutWalks believe that it is unacceptable for anyone to be sexually violated for any reason as stated in the poster included in Appendix A.

In an attempt to raise awareness of and combat rape culture women (and many men, too) engage in SlutWalks where they often dress as "sluts" in very little clothing. In some cases, rape victims will dress in the outfits they were assaulted in. However, the marchers are encouraged to wear whatever they want,

even if that means a full sweat suit given the nature of their credo that rape victims are never “asking for it” with their choice of clothing and accessories. The SlutWalks usually involve speakers and workshops as well. Additionally, a main focus of the marches is the reclamation, or reappropriation, of the word “slut,” which is a degrading term used for women viewed to be sexually promiscuous and/or unclean (*The American*). Some SlutWalk advocates argue that by embracing the term that is commonly used to disparage, they are in fact nullifying its harmful effects as a “rhetorical weapon” (Carr 30) in much the same way that the racial epithet, “nigger,” is used by Blacks among themselves despite the original derogatory character of the word (Peterson). Criticisms of this approach are extensive, however. Some women think the word “slut” and its close relatives are words not worthy of reclamation as they are believed to be intrinsically sexually violent toward women. It’s believed that flaunting the word “slut” as one’s own merely serves to reinforce the misogynic culture seen in the United States (Gibson). Furthermore, some critics feel that the movement (probably unintentionally) excludes ethnicities and socio-economic classes outside of middle to upper class white women who have always enjoyed the luxury of white privilege and consequently, have very different realities of sexual violence within the United States’ rape culture (“An Open Letter”).

A variety of studies have been conducted to address these two issues often within the scope of the overall Third Wave Feminist Movement’s goals, internationally and/or in isolated countries. Since the SlutWalks were only conceived very recently, their “success” long term is hard to measure but studies have attempted to look at the two years in question and the gains made by the Feminist Movement during that time period. Such studies include “Sluts and Riot Grrrls: Female Identity and Sexual Agency” by Feona Attwood, which delves into the current attempt to reappropriate “slut” for the political empowerment of women, or O’Keefe’s “Flaunting Our Way to Freedom? SlutWalks, Gendered Protest and Feminist Futures,” which investigates the use of one’s physical body, as demonstrated in the SlutWalks, for the same ultimate goal of empowering women politically.

Situated thematically among such studies, this study has important implications for the Feminist Movement within the United States because it focused on a new tactic within the movement. Some might argue that the SlutWalks are overly aggressive but at what point does this aggression become a necessity? Is this tactic over the top or what the movement needs to progress and/or sustain itself in the rampant rape culture? For obvious reasons, many women of the United States will find this study of interest as it addresses issues that have undoubtedly affected their lives, even if only indirectly.

Many men of the United States will also see the value of this study as they might empathize with the victims of rape culture, slut-shaming, and victim-

blaming as they may love and respect the women in their lives. SlutWalks also recognize that men become rape victims as well. By studying this sensitive set of issues, a better understanding of the precarious gender inequality situation within the United States can be achieved. With this increased awareness of the circumstances of rape culture and the rhetorical strategies used to combat it, one can begin to slowly peel away the fingers of the clenched hand of rape culture on the heart of the United States. The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of the reclamation of the word “slut” by the Third Wave Feminist Movement within the United States by examining the rhetorical strategies feminists employ in the rhetoric of SlutWalks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Various elements of the SlutWalks needed further investigation to shed light on this study’s place within the previous feminist literature on the matter and similar issues. An understanding of the following aspects provided a foundation for this study. The aspects include (1) overall goals of the SlutWalk Movement with special interest in the reappropriation of the derogatory term “slut,” (2) the concept of rape as a display of dominance, (3) the reinforcement of misogyny and rape culture, and (4) the goals of the Third Wave Feminist Movement particularly through the lenses of ethnicity, race, and socio-economic class.

### OVERALL SLUTWALK GOALS

The SlutWalks do not have a central organization, leader, or declaration, but one could argue that the mission statement of the inaugural SlutWalk in Toronto might serve as a manifesto of sorts for the movement as a whole. The mission statement, as found on the SlutWalk Toronto website, details the reasons victims of sexual violence are “tired” and have had more than enough. Following a brief shot of history and an equally brief explanation of the reappropriation of the word “slut,” the declaration goes into a lengthy listing of rape victims’ grievances with the current state of society. It concludes with a straightforward call to action, “Join us in our mission to spread the word that those who experience sexual assault are not the ones at fault, without exception” (“WHY”). The awareness of the pervasiveness of rape culture and victim-blaming is obviously of key concern to the movement.

One might examine the case study entitled *The SlutWalk Movement: A Study in Transnational Feminist Activism* by Joetta L. Carr that offers insight into the ultimate goals of the SlutWalks. Carr investigates the idea of victim-blaming and slut-shaming as a “rhetorical weapon” (30) with emphasis on the origins and common usage and understandings of “slut.” Carr presents both sides of the

argument citing Deborah Tolman and Gail Dines, prominent feminist scholars and activists. Tolman argues that embracing the term, only after its deconstruction, allows for women to express their “sexual agency and subjectivity.” However, Dines maintains that “slut” only perpetuates the “deeply rooted . . . patriarchal ‘madonna/whore’ view of women’s sexuality” (qtd. in Carr 32).

In another study done by Feona Attwood called “Sluts and Riot Grrrls: Female Identity and Sexual Agency” the history of the term “slut” is investigated, providing the understanding for the ways in which it is used in a number of contemporary contexts. Attwood delves into the complexities that surround the attempt at reappropriation of this word, which has historical roots in woman against woman rhetoric. Greer explains that during the eighteenth century, “slut” took on a more venomous connotation, courtesy of the “respectable women of the female servants who were employed for domestic use—and often unofficially for their sexual services” (qtd. in Atwood 234). Women started throwing around the word in reference to other women in order to emphasize their own virtue and status by “making alliances based on class rather than on sex” (Attwood 235). With this in mind, Attwood sought to explicate how patriarchal slurs such as “slut” operate to define women sexually within the culture and how women choose to interact with this reality. Although the study provides no clear-cut answers to the question of whether reappropriation of “slut” is worthwhile, it is an excellent discussion on the matter, highlighting many key aspects of the debate.

#### RAPE AS A DISPLAY OF DOMINANCE

The author of “Take a Walk on the Slutty Side: A Sociological Take on SlutWalk,” explained that patriarchal societies encourage male dominance and therefore, maintain “victim centric constructions.” She states:

Victim-blaming, what I term ‘victim-centric’ constructions of sexual assault, result in part from the fact that rape is a gendered act that occurs in patriarchal societies. More directly put: victim-centric discourse on rape persists because rape happens to women and men in societies that continue to value masculine performances of gender, which are highly conflated with behaviors that exhibit aggression and violence. (Degi)

To help illustrate this point, an example is included of both victim-centric and aggressor-centric rhetoric: “Victim-centric: ‘Never put down your drink at a party and then drink from it again.’ Aggressor-centric: ‘Never drug a person for the purpose of having non-consensual sex with them’” (Degi). In this sense, the author argues that rape is, in fact, a political maneuver, a way in which to keep

women subject to men to maintain the status quo of the traditionally patriarchal society.

#### REINFORCEMENT OF MISOGYNY AND RAPE CULTURE

Critics of the SlutWalk generally have issue with the reappropriation of the term “slut” claiming it reinforces misogyny and rape culture by making acceptable a term which shouldn’t be and unfortunately, already is to some extent. This theme is examined in an article from *The Guardian* by famous English-American feminist scholar, Gail Dines, and Wendy J. Murphy, an adjunct professor of a sexual violence seminar at New England Law-Boston. The article, called “SlutWalk is Not Sexual Liberation” speaks at length on the subject of the harms of reclaiming “slut,” stating that “women need to find ways to create their own authentic sexuality, outside of male-defined terms like slut.” Dines and Murphy believe that utilizing a word that has traditionally been used to suppress only furthers the male-centric agenda, making life for women only trickier, which is counterproductive.

Three additional studies came to similar conclusions. Kleinman, Ezzell, and Frost analyzed the reappropriation of the term “bitch,” concluding that reclaiming patriarchal slurs is unproductive resulting in a collective loss for women. Although focused specifically on “bitch” the study made clear that the implications were the same for other slurs meant to dehumanize women. Meanwhile, Kathy Miriam’s study concluded that utilizing “slut” in SlutWalk serves only to “demonstrate the extent to which . . . feminism functions like a product placement ad for capitalist patriarchy itself” (Miriam 266) because it is, as a movement, more focused on drawing attention to itself through its use of the “very semantics of rape culture” (262) rather than having some substance. In other words, it is through SlutWalk that “feminism . . . has converted from a term referring to a political movement to an identity term with no content” (262).

O’Keefe’s “comparative contextualization” study looked at a different aspect of SlutWalks, questioning whether engaging in a “body protest”—as in physically using one’s body in the manner demonstrated through the SlutWalks—is truly an act of defiance as intended or if it’s more realistically an act of compliance because of the purposeful sexualization of the women’s bodies. She ultimately concluded that the sexualization served to reinforce misogyny rather than combat it; body protests walk a fine line between defiance and compliance, and therefore, can be difficult to employ as an effective persuasive strategy.

### THIRD WAVE FEMINIST MOVEMENT GOALS IN RELATION TO THE ROLE OF RACE, ETHNICITY, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

In revisiting the study mentioned earlier, *The SlutWalk Movement: A Study in Transnational Feminist Activism*, one sees that it, too, touches on the sensitive issues of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic differences within the SlutWalk. The study speaks about an open letter that is, in fact, the selected artifact for analysis in this study. The letter in question was sent by Black Women's Blueprint to the organizers of SlutWalk Toronto in rejection of its attempts at reappropriation of "slut." However, Carr also includes opinions by Black women who think Black women should become more involved in SlutWalks. Salamishah Tillet, a Black professor of English and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, expresses her need to be in SlutWalk, despite some of the flaws articulated by the Black Women's Blueprint open letter. She claimed that as a "longtime activist against sexual violence who has seen the way survivors are consistently silenced, the idea of a march that brought attention to sexual violence and celebrated its survivors was too compelling to ignore" (qtd. in Carr 34). Janell Hobson, a Black women's studies professor at SUNY Albany, critiqued SlutWalk more harshly but maintained that Black women should involve themselves because "rather than oppose SlutWalk, [Black women] should think of ways it can be appropriated to serve our needs" (qtd. in Carr 34). Both Tillet and Hobson see the value in SlutWalks despite what many African American women view to be exclusionary rhetoric primarily through the use of "slut."

One would be hard-pressed to find many Black feminists that hold the same views as Tillet and Hobson. An explanation for this perspective is articulated in a piece by Mary Childers and bell hooks, featured in the collection called *Conflicts in Feminism* edited by Hirsch and Keller. Childers and hooks state:

When they [white middle to upper- class women] experience gender as the clearly dominant source for their own suffering, it is hard for them to realize that for other women the acquisition of gender may be inseparable from the discovery of themselves as economically and physically vulnerable people by virtue of poverty and/or race. This difficulty continues to inhibit cross-class dialogue and, thus, the establishment of political priorities that include a broad range of women. (qtd. in Hirsch and Keller 62).

This insight serves to explain why "women of color," despite their very real need for feminism, find little for them in much of the Feminist Movement's rhetoric. In some cases, it is so much so that they feel intentionally excluded. Childers and

hooks discuss the idea that until privilege is acknowledged among the white feminists, there will always be a sense of disjointedness within the Feminist Movement (Hirsch and Keller 75).

In her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks elaborates further stating that in their call for “Sisterhood” across the lines of race and class, white women feminists were inadvertently acting out racism in the fact that they think the feminist movement is theirs, “that they are the ‘hosts’ inviting us [African Americans] as ‘guests’ [to the movement]” (hooks 53). Similarly, Bonnie Thornton Dill goes on to explain in her essay, “Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood,” from *U.S. Women in Struggle: A Feminist Studies Anthology* the limitations of the Sisterhood concept especially in regards to African American feminists and their experiences. Sisterhood, meaning “an element of the Feminist Movement which serves as a means of political and economic action based upon the shared needs and experiences of women” (qtd. in Moses and Hartmann 278), is in and of itself exclusive. It excludes primarily minority and lower class women because, by nature of their heritage and/or financial situation, they do not share similar experiences with those of the white middle to upper-class women often seen propelling the movement forward. Dill believes “Sisterhood” is a weakness of the movement for this very reason and suggests a more pluralistic approach to combined political action (291), one that entails developing an understanding of the experiences of those unlike ourselves and in that process, recognizing and highlighting the similarities that do arise. Dill recommends “building coalitions around particular issues of shared interest” (291).

Because of this lack of solidarity within the movement, the Third Wave agenda, more so than previous waves of feminism, has a focus on unifying across the variety of ethnicities and races within the population of women. The book, *Women of Color in U.S. Society*, edited by Zinn and Dill, tries to establish a framework for this focus, fittingly called “multiracial feminism” (Zinn and Dill 11). Multiracial feminism is “a body of knowledge. . . [that] treats racial inequality as a vital shaper of women’s and men’s lives and advances a coherent and powerful premise—that racial ancestry, ethnic heritage, and economic status are as important as gender for analyzing the social construction of women and men” (11). In their essay, “Second thoughts on the Second Wave,” Rosenfelt and Stacey tend to agree. They argue that feminists, in harmony with the Third Wave objectives, should work toward a more progressive agenda including “criticizing their privatistic, racial, and heterosexist limitations and drawing out their more radical implications. In this way we can foster the revitalization of feminism . . . [not] forgetful of its liberating vision” (565). Although such practices would produce a more radical movement, which frightens many, Rosenfelt and Stacey believe it is necessary for the ultimate success of the Feminist Movement as it is

the only viable course of action to break through ethnic and racial barriers (among others) that are only serving to hinder progress.

In short, the four elements elaborated on above served as a foundation on which to base the study as obviously, there are a multitude of angles to consider in the SlutWalk Movement. The overarching research question was: in regards to overall Third Wave feminist goals in the United States, are SlutWalks achieving the desired long term outcome? To assess this, a sub question was developed: Is the rhetorical strategy of “taking back” the word “slut” having the desired effect? More generally, is the offensive rather than the defensive approach serving the movement well?

## METHOD

According to Charles Larson, Kenneth Burke “is considered to be the most influential rhetorical scholar of the modern era. He continues to wield major impact upon communication scholarship even though he was a literary scholar and critic” (83). Burke was a prolific writer in a number of scholarly fields, but it is out of his ideas of the dramatic pentad that the method currently referred to as cluster criticism developed. Under the umbrella of dramatic criticism, Burke’s take on language is that the use of it is, in and of itself, an action, so in this sense “language *is* reality; it is not a symbol for reality. . . . Given this notion, dramatism allows a critic to analyze the reality experienced by different rhetors” (Burghardt 205). An excellent example of this concept can be found in “Betty Friedan’s Meaning of *Power*: A Cluster Analysis” by Elizabeth Riley Avalos, which will be discussed in greater depth later. As such, this concept has carried over into cluster criticism methodology and accounts for the ultimate goal of identifying the rhetor’s motive through his or her specific word choice in the artifact in question.

The cluster criticism method, as described by Sonja Foss in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*, is relatively user-friendly. Although one’s analysis may become complex due to the nature of that which is being studied, the steps of the method themselves are straightforward. Additionally, cluster criticism is unique because it can be applied to nearly any artifact. In fact, the artifact doesn’t even need to contain words necessarily. Cluster criticism can be effectively utilized in an analysis of a portrait, for example, in which case the “terms” used can be such things as colors or shapes (Foss, “Cluster” 368). Furthermore, cluster criticism is grounded firmly in the humanistic tradition of rhetorical criticism due to its highly subjective nature. It relies heavily on each critic’s individual thoughts and interpretations, leaving the door open to the possibility of any number of post-analysis truths.

Foss outlines the four basic steps to follow in a cluster criticism. First, one must identify the key terms, or as the case may be, symbols, in the artifact. This step is important because selecting the key terms is a meticulous process that requires examining the frequency and/or intensity of the terms. Obviously, significance can be assigned to those terms that appear more often in the artifact because that repetition necessarily suggests it. However, significance may also be assigned to those terms that although infrequent (or perhaps only mentioned a single time), hold enough weight. That is to say, a term may be particularly potent. It is important to note here that such terms may present themselves as “god terms” or “devil terms.” Whereas “god terms are ultimate terms that represent the ideal for the rhetor—the rhetor’s view of what is best or perfect . . . devil terms are the counterparts . . . and represent the ultimate negative or evil for the rhetor” (Foss, “Cluster” 368). Weaver explains further stating that a god term is an expression “about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers . . . its force imparts to the others their lesser degree of force” (211). Weaver also highlights the fact that god and devil terms are subjective and therefore, at various times, interchangeable depending on who is using them.

The second step of cluster criticism entails charting the clusters around the selected key terms. By looking at the placement of the term within the artifact’s text, the critic can begin to examine the terms that are nearby, both physically and conceptually. They may actually be close to the key term or separated by a word or two. They may also share a connection in a cause-and-effect relationship, an expression of interdependency between the two (Foss 369). Only after examining this clustering process, can one proceed to the third step of discovering patterns within them. This step is fairly self-explanatory and is highly subjective, but lends itself nicely to identifying overall themes. For example, if a word is consistently in the cluster of a specific devil term a critic might make the assumption that it suggests a relationship between the two in the mind of the rhetor. This can provide valuable insight as well if the two terms appear together often but seem incongruent. The harmony, or lack of, in the relationships between the related terms can be telling and serve as more fodder for analysis (369). Burke stresses the fact that:

We take it for granted that, insofar as men cannot themselves create the universe, there must be something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives, and that this underlying enigma will manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies among the terms for motives. Accordingly, what we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity*, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise* (Burke, “Introduction” xii-iii).

The final step of the cluster criticism is that of naming the motive. This means that using the patterns found in the third step, the critic nails down the rhetor's motive. In the words of Foss, "the critic is required to be creative here" (369) as any number of motives may be possible given the patterns and corresponding themes of the artifact's previously identified key terms. Although several motive options may emerge the critic is advised to choose the one that is most readily supported by the evidence of the analysis to strengthen the claim. However, it is important to note here that Kenneth Burke strongly believes that "there is no need to 'supply' motives. The interrelationships themselves [between the key terms and their associated terms] *are* the motives . . . . The motivation out of which he [the rhetor] writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes" (Burke, *Philosophy* 20). This is further emphasized in Larson's *Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility*, which states that in Burkean rhetorical theory, "all words have emotional shadings and reveal the various degrees of our feelings, attitudes, values, and judgments" (134).

In studying cluster criticism, one might find the two cluster criticisms included in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice* particularly helpful. "Women Priests in the Episcopal Church: A Cluster Analysis of Establishment Rhetoric" by Foss analyzes the Church's response to the ordination of eleven female priests, which was an abnormal event because of the longstanding tradition of excluding women from the priesthood. This analysis was used to draw further conclusions about the general way that the Church deals with similar conflicts. Foss gathered information about the key terms and their neighboring terms strategically placed in the Church discourse surrounding the ordination. The cluster criticism method served to display transparently the intentions of the Church and their "damage control" tactics (Foss 371-387).

Meanwhile, "Betty Friedan's Meaning of *Power*: A Cluster Analysis" by Elizabeth Riley Avalos looks at the sometimes confusing evolution in the rhetoric of Betty Friedan, a famous feminist writer and activist many deem as having sparked the Second Wave of feminism in the United States with her work, *The Feminine Mystique*. Some feminists became concerned with Friedan's later discourse thinking she had turned on feminism. Avalos examined the usage of the term "power" in both Friedan's earlier and later discourse. She found in her cluster criticism of the earlier writings that generally "power" in its negative forms such as "impotence" was associated with women and that this lack of power creates an imbalance between the two genders that women were trying to alter. However, in her later works Friedan differentiated between two different types of power, referred to as the "old" and "new" by Avalos and focused less on the gender specificity of power delegation and use (Avalos 388-402). By employing cluster criticism for her analysis Avalos was able to come to the conclusion that Friedan's ideology did not shift dramatically from her original

sentiments. Rather, it changed slightly in light of the Feminist Movement's successes and new or redefined perceived societal problems the movement should address.

Another study worth exploring for a deeper understanding of cluster criticism as a viable method of rhetorical criticism is "Three Sheers for Kenneth Burke" by Laura Crowell. Interestingly enough, Crowell sought to utilize a variation of cluster criticism on the works of the founder of the method himself. She examined a collection of Burke's writings over the course of three decades because she had initially noticed the frequency of the term "sheer." This frequency, which increases over the decades, points clearly to "sheer" as a key term and from there, Crowell began to create clusters of association. She noticed that there were often quotation marks and/or italicized text around "sheer" in addition to similar sounding words, most noticeably "pure" but others such as "clear," "here," "experience," and "sincere" to name a few (153). In her exploration of the treatment of the word "sheer" she discovered that there were an additional eighteen "recurrent manifestations" (156), or other key terms. After grouping said terms into the clusters (1) discrimination, (2) change, (3) uncertainty, (4) completion, and (5) whimsicality, Crowell was able to assess Burke's use of "sheer" in the context of each cluster respectively, consequently revealing Burke's overarching motive in the bulk of his written work (167). Although Crowell modified slightly the basic steps of Burke's cluster criticism it was still an effective method for establishing why Burke chose (whether consciously or otherwise) the terms he did.

Cluster criticism is the method chosen for this study because it allows for the analysis of the artifact in opposition to the attempt at reappropriation of the term "slut." By identifying key terms and their associated terms within the open letter to SlutWalk Toronto, one can more accurately assess the perspective and motive behind the writing of the artifact. By identifying this motive, the effectiveness of the use of "slut" within the goals of both the SlutWalk alone and the larger Feminist Movement became more apparent. Cluster criticism is a method that provides insight into motives and therefore, sheds light on the reception of the SlutWalk's rhetorical strategies specifically in the context of the African American women's experience. In its employment of the reappropriation tactic, this reception is intricately linked to the overall success of the SlutWalk.

## ANALYSIS

The artifact examined for this study is the September 23, 2011, open letter to SlutWalk Toronto from the Black Women's Blueprint (see Appendix B), which expressed distaste with the attempt at reappropriating "slut." Black Women's Blueprint is a civil and human rights organization "committed to amplifying the

voices of women of African descent in all their diversity . . . providing the personal and political spaces as well as the resources needed for women to engage in intersectional advocacy at the grassroots and societal level” (“Our Work”). The organization focuses on ending sexual violence and lessening the hardships experienced by African American women because of their race, gender, socio-economic status, or any combination of the three. The letter was selected for both its content and length, so as to supply ample material for analysis. In accordance with the guidelines of cluster criticism, four key terms were identified: (1) “slut” and its variations, (2) “Black” and “of color”, (3) space, and (4) rape. All four were selected for their frequency. These key terms and their corresponding clusters revealed four themes: (1) reinforcement, (2) oppression, (3) lack of space, and (4) difference.

#### REINFORCEMENT

Reinforcement, in this sense, refers to the inadvertent bolstering of rape culture and misogyny, as discussed previously in the Literature Review. This is not to suggest that this artifact itself reinforced such values. Rather, the rhetors, per their discussion of the usage of “slut” in SlutWalk, perceive that key term as doing so. This theme was obvious in all of the clusters examined but most especially so in the clusters around “slut” and “Black.” “Slut” appears eight times in the artifact if one excludes the instances in which it is used in the term “SlutWalk.” However, other variations of the term are utilized as well: “ho,” “jezebel,” and “whore” each twice and “hooker” once. “Black” appears seventeen times and “of color” four times. In many ways, because of the proximity of the two key words “slut” and “Black,” the clusters of associated terms overlapped creating some level of confusion as to which terms applied to which. Ultimately, it does not end up making much of a difference because in either scenario rape culture and misogyny are being reinforced.

In the context of “Black,” it is merely with special interest in the reinforcement of those, specifically in regards to the treatment of African American women, who have been dealt the poor hand of not only their gender but their race as well. Such terms that appear nearby include “sexist/racist vernacular,” “validating,” “normalizing,” “encourage,” and “reinforce” all in reference to various aspects of rape culture. For example, as demonstrated in Appendix B, the letter makes the statement, “We do not want to **encourage** our young men, our Black fathers, sons and brothers to **reinforce** Black women’s identities as ‘sluts’ by **normalizing** the term on t-shirts, buttons, flyers and pamphlets” (par. 7). The rape culture concept of women as nothing more than objects or possessions was also highlighted through the use of words such as “bodies” and “misrepresentations.” “Acceptance” was also used in close proximity to “slut” to

suggest that the reappropriation of “slut” will lead to an acceptance or tolerance of rape culture values and practices, as the feminists are then “giving them the message that we can self-identify as ‘sluts’” (par. 6).

Furthermore, “slut” reveals itself as a devil term for the members of the Black Women’s Blueprint. This is clear in the entirety of the language that surrounds the use of “slut” in the open letter. One need not pick out the most aggressive terms such as “destructive” and “dehumanize” to see the overall negative connotations in the neighboring words. This is especially interesting because by the nature of its name, SlutWalk is actively trying to make “slut” a god term, pulling it out of the negativity it currently embodies and represents. This provides a fascinating dynamic between two ends of the spectrum. The rhetors of the open letter are adamant that “slut” is the end all be all of devil terms and that it is completely beyond the point of redemption by anybody, feminist or otherwise. Consequently, they feel compelled to call attention to and condemn its usage in the SlutWalk Movement.

#### OPPRESSION

The second theme that emerged is most intimately linked to the key terms “rape” and “Black”/“of color.” The term “oppression” itself is used four times and other closely related terms appear as well including “trivialization” in regards to sexual violence, “absence of justice,” and “racist/sexist structures.” The key term “rape” was selected for its frequency as it was used fifteen times. In the clusters around “rape” words such as “attack,” “violation,” “assault,” “dehumanize,” and “devalue” are used abundantly showing plainly what the rhetors say in the phrase, “rape . . . is a radical weapon of oppression” (par. 8). This is a concept previously elaborated on in the article “Take a Walk on the Slutty Side: A Sociological Take on SlutWalk.” The writers of the open letter would most likely agree with Degi’s assertion that rape is political and serves to oppress women. This is only exacerbated when the victim is also an African American because the oppression of her race is institutionalized as well. The theme of oppression was apparent in the cluster “Black” because of the terms, “kidnappings,” “lynching,” “misrepresentations,” “struggle” (used four times in the artifact), “dehumanize,” “devaluation,” and “erasure.” They all point to the unjust nature of the Black experience in the United States, one that treats African Americans as sub-human, second class citizens. The following excerpt embodies this sentiment:

For us the trivialization of rape and the absence of justice are viciously intertwined with narratives of sexual surveillance, legal access and availability to our personhood. It is tied to institutionalized ideology about our bodies as sexualized objects of property, as spectacles of sexuality and

deviant sexual desire . . . The perception and wholesale acceptance of speculations about what the Black woman wants, what she needs and what she deserves has truly, long crossed the boundaries of her mode of dress (par. 4).

Additionally, the Black Women's Blueprint emphasizes the notion of the prevalence of this oppression that is rape culture and also racism toward African American women. The pervasiveness of the problem is seen in associated terms like "everywhere" and "culture" and in phrases like "every level of society" (par. 12) and "institutionalized ideology" (par. 4). The rhetors believe that the inseparable rape culture and racism mixture make a miserable everyday existence for African American women, a constant reminder of their oppression.

#### LACK OF SPACE

The theme of the lack of space made itself apparent in the physical appearance of the key term "space." It could be argued that it is interchangeable with "privilege" as well because from the perspective of the Black Women's Blueprint, it is due to the lack of privilege that one finds herself with no space. "Space" is used four times in the artifact and "privilege" thrice. Consistently, one spots words that suggest the Black woman's marginalization by the SlutWalk Movement, or more generally, the Feminist Movement. This is crystallized in the quotation, "we **struggle** with the decision to answer this call by . . . supporting something that even in name **exemplifies** the ways in which **mainstream** women's movements have **repeatedly excluded** Black women even in **spaces** where our participation is most crucial" (par. 5). Unmistakably, the rhetors believe that if one is lacking space, it is most likely due to their lack of privilege, which is the case for African American women in the United States. They do not enjoy the luxuries of white privilege and it because of this that they are not afforded any space in the SlutWalk Movement; they cannot claim the term "slut" for themselves. For the writers of the open letter to SlutWalk Toronto, privilege is space.

This is an unfortunate truth given the considerable good the Black women can bring to the table for the Feminist Movement. The Black Women's Blueprint recognizes that African American women would be a force to be reckoned with if they were afforded "space" within the movement. Terms that imply this idea include "participation," "denounce" in reference to "rape and sexual assault," and "annihilate" in reference to sexist slurs. These are verbs, words that necessarily suggest action on the part of Black feminists. It indicates an active commitment from them. The writers also pair the term "crucial" with Black woman's "participation" to further drive home the point that African American involvement will only serve to help the Feminist Movement in its endeavor to achieve equality.

## DIFFERENCE

The final theme that emerged in the analysis was that of difference. This refers to the sense of difference the rhetors of the open letter feel between themselves and those who enjoy the benefits of white privilege. The terms that express this feeling of difference are found most prominently in the clusters around the key terms “Black” and “slut.” Although some words by themselves embody the notion, phrases surrounding the key terms did a better job. For example, in a phrase near “Black” the letter states, “The perception and wholesale acceptance of speculations about what the **Black** woman wants, what she needs and what she deserves has truly, long crossed the boundaries of her mode of dress” (par. 4). This sentence like many of the others within the vicinity of “Black”/“of color” exposes the sentiment that African American women have a different experience within United States society, one far past that of their clothing choice. The rhetors of the artifact express the fact that Black feminists don’t have the ability to march in the context of SlutWalk, claiming “slut,” and marchers thinking “that this will make women safer in our communities an hour later, a month later, or a year later” (par. 6).

A particularly powerful choice of words was used in the phrase claiming Black women’s “clothed or unclothed bodies as **unable to be raped** whether on the auction block, in the fields or on living room television screens” (par. 4). This is a completely foreign concept to the majority of the white women involved in the movement because they do not suffer under the same stereotypes as African American women in the forms of “ho,” “jezebel,” “slut,” and “sapphire” to name a few. Black women are stereotyped as having irrepressible endless “deviant sexual desire.” Therefore, they cannot be raped because rape necessarily implies it was unwanted. According to the rhetors, these stereotypes are a result of a “historically entrenched ideology and recurring messages” (par. 4). The rhetors identify the history of Black women as the main reason for difference. This is evident in the terms, “historically” and “histories” but also in those that directly make connection to the past such as “Jim Crow kidnappings,” “lynching,” “Civil Rights movement,” “Women’s Suffrage,” and “Black Nationalist and Black Feminist movements.” The rhetors also use the phrase “since the 19<sup>th</sup> century” emphasizing further the idea that the Black woman’s present-day plight is an unfortunate culmination of the events beforehand and has been unpleasant for a great while. This history is not a shared one with the women of the dominant culture, so it strengthens the theme of difference between the two.

Although the writers of the open letter acknowledge that there is legitimate reason for outrage when women are considered to be “asking for it” with their clothing selection, they also think the narrow focus on that specific

aspect through the SlutWalk overlooks and consequently, trivializes the Black woman's experience. The Black Women's Blueprint poses the question, how can the SlutWalk charge ahead in the fight for equality if their movement treats another minority group (African Americans, in this case) unequally?

Per the analysis, the motive of the Black Women Blueprint's open letter to SlutWalk Toronto was revealed. The organization is trying to persuade the SlutWalk leaders that the attempt at reappropriation of "slut" reinforces rape culture and misogyny, especially in light of the Black woman's experience in the United States, both currently and historically, where they have no privilege to exercise as do the feminists of the dominant culture. They perceive rape and sexual assault as a means of oppression linked very closely to race in addition to gender.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study reaffirms the notion that language is powerful. "Slut" is a tiny four-letter word that has served to oppress countless women in the U.S. rape culture, one that keeps women subservient, deferring to males on everything from their clothing choices to their sexual activity and preferences lest they receive mistreatment. This mistreatment could include but is by no means limited to verbal criticism, mockery, or sexual violence as demonstrated through rape. The open letter by the Black Women's Blueprint focuses on this very idea.

The motive behind the open letter to SlutWalk Toronto has important implications for the SlutWalk Movement because it sheds light on the effects of the new rhetorical strategy of reclaiming "slut." This strategy is widely viewed as radical but there is disagreement on its necessity and perceived success. As previously stated, how the term "slut" functions within the movement is significant for women and men alike because of the insidious nature of rape culture in the United States. Rape culture reaches far and wide in United States society and unless studied and scrutinized, an understanding of the gender inequality circumstances will fail to expand. Through an increased understanding of this specific set of conditions in which the U.S. woman lives every day, it is more likely that rape culture will be eliminated, or at the very least stifled, effectively. This study serves as merely a stepping stone in this direction.

The research questions included: (1) In regards to United States Third Wave feminist goals, are SlutWalks achieving the desired long-term outcome? (2) Is the strategy of reclaiming "slut" having the desired effect? More generally, is the offensive rather than the defensive approach serving the movement well? In recalling the research questions one sees quite plainly that the study has a number of limitations, the most prominent being a lack of time and the overall scope of the project. Had there been the opportunity for more time investment, one might

have also analyzed some of the primary artifacts from the SlutWalks themselves such as a poster held by a protestor or a phrase written in lipstick across a protestor's exposed breasts.

It could also be interesting to study the placement of the word "Sisters" in reference to the leaders of the Toronto SlutWalk, in the open letter. As reiterated in the Literature Review, Bonnie Thornton Dill believes employing the use of the "sisterhood" concept is a failure within the Feminist Movement. Given the connotations of "sister" within the Black culture, it was a peculiar word choice in addressing the white demographic of SlutWalk Toronto, especially because of the theme of difference that was pervasive in the letter. The difference between Black and white women's experiences of U.S. rape culture was pounded home throughout, but the term "Sisters" seems to present a conflicting notion. Further investigation is warranted.

Given a more generous amount of time to investigate, one might also have spent time delving into other responses to the SlutWalk Movement from both white women and other minority group members so as to add more breadth to the analysis. One of the limitations of looking at the open letter by the Black Women's Blueprint is that it does not account for other minorities necessarily as it draws on Black-specific experiences such as slavery and "Jim Crow kidnappings." Similarly, the connotations of the word "slut" for white women is not explicitly clear in the SlutWalk and a comparative analysis of those connotations and those of the African American experience has the potential to be particularly helpful in bridging the misunderstanding between the two cultures. Such a study would beg the question, just how different are the connotations and in what ways are they alike?

Furthermore, examining the discourse in response to the Black Women's Blueprint open letter might be insightful, more specifically that of other African American women and of SlutWalk Toronto's leaders. A response to the letter is featured on the Global Women's Strike Website. It is written by Selma James, the co-coordinator of the Global Women's Strike and also co-founder of the International Wages for Housework Campaign. She calls attention to the undervalued chores of the housewife or the woman juggling both housework and a job. In her article she says that the Black Women's Blueprint is inaccurate in claiming that women of color do not identify with the SlutWalk because in her opinion, speaking as a Black feminist, women of color are those most likely to be called "sluts" and embracing the term would cancel out its harmful effects. She also sees very little difference between the connotations of "slut" for either the white woman or the Black woman regardless of the Black woman's history in the United States. In essence, James believes that the Black Women's Blueprint's response is only furthering the gap between white women and Black women stating, "Whatever their purpose, the result is to divide us from other women, with

no benefit for most of us” (James). She lists many of the racially inclusive steps the SlutWalks have made in attempt to avoid the very problem the open letter is highlighting. She believes that if the Black Women’s Blueprint perceives SlutWalk to be exclusive of Black women, then they need to intentionally include themselves; they can work to make themselves more visible in the movement by being physically present in the marches.

The answer from SlutWalk Toronto to the Black Women’s Blueprint could be another crucial artifact to study. The rhetors claim that they are “currently in the process of determining what changes may be needed . . . and [hope to] become progressively more thoughtful of intersectionalities and united across them in our fight against sexual violence and victim-blaming” (“From the Ground Up”). They acknowledge that there is room for improvement, but they make it clear that their jurisdiction is restricted to SlutWalk Toronto. All other SlutWalks, and their variations such as Consent Fests and *Marchas de las Putas*, are the product of specific cities or regions collaborating to coordinate such an event. Although SlutWalk Toronto can be recognized as the first of its kind and sparking the subsequent movement it does not intend to dictate how the other cities’ SlutWalks will function. The rhetors explain that they intend to conduct an open forum to gather information about what within the previous SlutWalk Toronto needs to be addressed, specifically in regards to the issues of race, ethnicity, and privilege. They also claim they will “engage more with the signatories of the Open Letter from Black Women to the SlutWalk and other voices from outside of Toronto” (“From the Ground Up”) as they seek to break through societal norms. The rhetors also present a call to action to those who originally signed the open letter to SlutWalk Toronto. They strongly encourage them to participate in the SlutWalks of their respective areas to help the leaders construct and enforce a more inclusive movement. They end the response letter by reemphasizing the grander scheme of spreading awareness of and fighting against sexual violence.

In conclusion, for the purpose of this study’s research questions, answers can be offered but leave considerable room for more examination. The analysis provides the evidence to support a resounding “no” to the research question. SlutWalks, despite the good intentions, are not having the desired effect in regards to U.S. Third Wave Feminist Movement goals generally or those of the SlutWalk more specifically. Although the SlutWalks have achieved the desired effect of raising awareness of rape culture and victim-blaming, the Third Wave goal of incorporating all races, ethnicities, and socio-economic classes of women that are subject to the male-centric culture of the United States has not been met. In fact, analysis of the open letter from the Black Women’s Blueprint Organization reveals that the most recent rhetorical strategy of reappropriating “slut” is working against this overall feminist goal as it is viewed to be solely applicable to

the experience of rape culture and sexual violence through the white woman's perspective and therefore, feels exclusive to other races and ethnicities. Whether or not this is true is irrelevant because the letter speaks for itself. If the Black feminists view there to be an exclusion from SlutWalk based on their coloring than there is division between the two races even if it is one further perpetuated by the open letter. While there seems to be some consensus among prominent feminists that an offensive approach will be most effective in combating rape culture, a successful strategy has yet to be proposed and put into action. This approach of reclaiming "slut" is falling short in many respects and should be discarded as a rhetorical strategy as it is only decreasing the needed solidarity among U.S. feminists. In the words of the rhetors of the open letter to SlutWalk Toronto, "rape and sexual assault is a radical weapon of oppression and we are in full agreement that it requires radical people and radical strategies to counter it," but there is the need for reevaluation and starting anew with a different strategy entirely.

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APPENDIX A

WAS I **ASKING** FOR IT? DID I **DESERVE** IT?

# SLUTWALK LOND♥N

SATURDAY **22** SEPTEMBER

MEET **12.30PM**

TOP OF PICCADILLY NEXT TO HYDE PARK CORNER

**BECAUSE RAPE  
IS NEVER THE  
VICTIM'S FAULT.**

Not if she was drunk. Not if she was naked.  
Not if she was wearing a miniskirt or a veil. Not if  
she was a sex worker. Not if the authorities didn't  
believe her. Not if she was queer. Not if she was a  
woman of colour. Not if she was seeking asylum.

Not if she was your partner. Not if she was  
disabled. Not if the victim was male.

**SHOW YOUR PRIDE  
EVERYONE WELCOME**

WALK, ROLL, HOLLER OR **STOMP** WITH US!

**SlutMeansSpeakUp.org.uk**

Facebook: SlutWalkLondonUK @SlutWalkLondon

## APPENDIX B

### **An Open Letter from Black Women to the SlutWalk September 23, 2011**

We the undersigned women of African descent and anti-violence advocates, activists, scholars, organizational and spiritual leaders wish to address the SlutWalk. First, we commend the organizers on their bold and vast mobilization to end the shaming and blaming of sexual assault victims for violence committed against them by other members of society. We are proud to be living in this moment in time where girls and boys have the opportunity to witness the acts of extraordinary women resisting oppression and challenging the myths that feed rape culture everywhere.

The police officer's comments in Toronto that ignited the organizing of the first SlutWalk and served to trivialize, omit and dismiss women's continuous experiences of sexual exploitation, assault, and oppression are an attack upon our collective spirits. Whether the dismissal of rape and other violations of a woman's body be driven by her mode of dress, line of work, level of intoxication, her class, and in cases of Black and brown bodies—her race, we are in full agreement that no one deserves to be raped.

#### **The Issue At Hand**

We are deeply concerned. As Black women and girls we find no space in SlutWalk, no space for participation and to unequivocally denounce rape and sexual assault as we have experienced it. We are perplexed by the use of the term “slut” and by any implication that this word, much like the word “Ho” or the “N” word should be re-appropriated. The way in which we are perceived and what happens to us before, during and after sexual assault crosses the boundaries of our mode of dress. Much of this is tied to our particular history. In the United States, where slavery constructed Black female sexualities, Jim Crow kidnappings, rape and lynchings, gender misrepresentations, and more recently, where the Black female immigrant struggle combine, “slut” has different associations for Black women. We do not recognize ourselves nor do we see our lived experiences reflected within SlutWalk and especially not in its brand and its label.

As Black women, we do not have the privilege or the space to call ourselves “slut” without validating the already historically entrenched ideology and recurring messages about what and who the Black woman is. We don't have the privilege to play on destructive representations burned in our collective minds, on our bodies and souls for generations. Although we understand the valid impetus

behind the use of the word “slut” as language to frame and brand an anti-rape movement, we are gravely concerned. For us the trivialization of rape and the absence of justice are viciously intertwined with narratives of sexual surveillance, legal access and availability to our personhood. It is tied to institutionalized ideology about our bodies as sexualized objects of property, as spectacles of sexuality and deviant sexual desire. It is tied to notions about our clothed or unclothed bodies as unable to be raped whether on the auction block, in the fields or on living room television screens. The perception and wholesale acceptance of speculations about what the Black woman wants, what she needs and what she deserves has truly, long crossed the boundaries of her mode of dress.

We know the SlutWalk is a call to action and we have heard you. Yet we struggle with the decision to answer this call by joining with or supporting something that even in name exemplifies the ways in which mainstream women’s movements have repeatedly excluded Black women even in spaces where our participation is most critical. We are still struggling with the how, why and when and ask at what impasse should the SlutWalk have included substantial representation of Black women in the building and branding of this U.S. based movement to challenge rape culture?

Black women in the U.S. have worked tirelessly since the 19th century colored women’s clubs to rid society of the sexist/racist vernacular of slut, jezebel, hottentot, mammy, mule, sapphire; to build our sense of selves and redefine what women who look like us represent. Although we vehemently support a woman’s right to wear whatever she wants anytime, anywhere, within the context of a “SlutWalk” we don’t have the privilege to walk through the streets of New York City, Detroit, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, L.A. etc., either half-naked or fully clothed self-identifying as “sluts” and think that this will make women safer in our communities an hour later, a month later, or a year later. Moreover, we are careful not to set a precedent for our young girls by giving them the message that we can self-identify as “sluts” when we’re still working to annihilate the word “ho”, which deriving from the word “hooker” or “whore”, as in “Jezebel whore” was meant to dehumanize. Lastly, we do not want to **encourage** our young men, our Black fathers, sons and brothers to **reinforce Black** women’s identities as “sluts” by **normalizing** the term on t-shirts, buttons, flyers and pamphlets. *(Yellow highlighting here represents the key term, and the green represents the associated terms that reveal the reinforcement theme in the cluster criticism.)*

The personal is political. For us, the problem of trivialized rape and the absence of justice are intertwined with race, gender, sexuality, poverty, immigration and

community. As Black women in America, we are careful not to forget this or we may compromise more than we are able to recover. Even if only in name, we cannot afford to label ourselves, to claim identity, to chant dehumanizing rhetoric against ourselves in any movement. We can learn from successful movements like the Civil Rights movement, from Women's Suffrage, the Black Nationalist and Black Feminist movements that we can make change without resorting to the taking-back of words that were never ours to begin with, but in fact heaved upon us in a process of dehumanization and devaluation.

### **What We Ask**

Sisters from Toronto, rape and sexual assault is a radical weapon of oppression and we are in full agreement that it requires radical people and radical strategies to counter it. In that spirit, and because there is so much work to be done and great potential to do it together, we ask that the SlutWalk be even more radical and break from what has historically been the erasure of Black women and their particular needs, their struggles as well as their potential and contributions to feminist movements and all other movements.

Women in the United States are racially and ethnically diverse. Every tactic to gain civil and human rights must not only consult and consider women of color, but it must equally center all our experiences and our communities in the construction, launching, delivery and sustainment of that movement.

We ask that SlutWalk take critical steps to become cognizant of the histories of people of color and engage women of color in ways that respect culture, language and context.

We ask that SlutWalk consider engaging in a re-branding and re-labeling process and believe that given the current popularity of the Walk, its thousands of followers will not abandon the movement simply because it has changed its label.

We ask that the organizers participating in the SlutWalk take further action to end the trivialization of rape at every level of society. Take action to end the use of the word "rape" as if it were a metaphor and also take action to end the use of language invented to perpetuate racist/sexist structures and intended to dehumanize and devalue.

In the spirit of building a revolutionary movement to end sexual assault, end rape myths and end rape culture, we ask that SlutWalk move forward in true authenticity and solidarity to organize beyond the marches and demonstrations as SlutWalk. Develop a more critical, a more strategic and sustainable plan for

bringing women together to demand countries, communities, families and individuals uphold each other's human right to bodily integrity and collectively speak a resounding NO to violence against women.

We would welcome a meeting with the organizers of SlutWalk to discuss the intrinsic potential in its global reach and the sheer number of followers it has energized. We'd welcome the opportunity to engage in critical conversation with the organizers of SlutWalk about strategies for remaining accountable to the thousands of women and men, marchers it left behind in Brazil, in New Delhi, South Korea and elsewhere—marchers who continue to need safety and resources, marchers who went back home to their communities and their lives. We would welcome a conversation about the work ahead and how this can be done together with groups across various boundaries, to end sexual assault beyond the marches.

As women of color standing at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, class and more, we will continue to be relentless in the struggle to dismantle the unacceptable systems of oppression that designedly besiege our everyday lives. We will continue to fight for the development of policies and initiatives that prioritize the primary prevention of sexual assault, respect women and individual rights, agency and freedoms and holds offenders accountable. We will consistently demand justice whether under governmental law, at community levels, or via community strategies for those who have been assaulted; and organize to end sexual assaults of persons from all walks of life, all genders, all sexualities, all races, all ethnicity, all histories.

**Signed by:** The Board of Directors and Board of Advisors, Black Women's Blueprint | Farah Tanis, Co-Founder, Executive Director, Black Women's Blueprint | **Endorsed by:** Toni M. Bond Leonard, President/CEO of Black Women for Reproductive Justice (BWRJ), Chicago, Illinois | Kelli Dorsey, Executive Director, Different Avenues, Washington, D.C. | S. Mandisa Moore | The Women's Health and Justice Initiative, New Orleans, Louisiana | Black and Proud, Baton Rouge, Louisiana | Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts | Population and Development Program, Amherst, Massachusetts | Zeinab Eyega, New York, New York | Black Women's Network, Los Angeles, California | League of Black Women, Chicago, Illinois | Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, Minneapolis, Minnesota | Brooklyn Young Mother's Collective, Brooklyn, New York | Women's HIV Collaborative, New York, New York | National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA), Connecticut | Girls for Gender Equity, Brooklyn, New York | My Sister's Keeper, Brooklyn, New York | The Mothers Agenda New York (the M.A.N.Y.), Brooklyn, New

York | Sojourners Group For Women, Salt Lake City, Utah | Dr. Andreana Clay, Queer Black Feminist Blog, Oakland, California | Dr. Ida E. Jones, Historian, Author, *The Heart of the Race Problem: The Life of Kelly Miller* | Willi Coleman, Professor of Women's History, member of the Association of Black Women Historians, Laura Rahman, Director, *Broken Social Contracts*, Atlanta, Georgia | Marlene McCurtis, Director, *Wednesdays in Mississippi* Film Project | Issa Rae, Producer, Director, Writer, *Awkward Black Girl*, Los Angeles, California | *The Prison Birth Project* | Ebony Noelle Golden, Creative Director, *Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative & The RingShout for Reproductive Justice* | Yvonne Moore, Southern California, Sexual Assault Survivor | Kola Boo, Novelist, Poet, Womanist | Jessicah A. Murrell, Spelman College C'11, Candidate for M.A. Women's Studies | Shanika Thomas | Cathy Gillespie | Kristin Simpson, Brooklyn, New York | Mkali-Hashiki, Certified Sexological Bodyworker, Certified Sound, Voice, & Music Healing Practitioner, Owner & Operator of *Body Ecstasy, Erotic Wellness Facilitation* | Linda Mizell, Ed.D., Assistant Professor School of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder | Sherley Accime, President, C.E.O. ANEW, NY, *SeaElle Integrated Therapies* | Diedre F. Houchen, M.A. Ed., Alumni Doctoral Fellow, Black Education, University of Florida | Hanalei Ramos, Co-founder, *Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment*, NYC | Minh-Ha T. Pham, Cornell University Professor | Cynthia Nibbelink Worley (W.A.R., Women Against Rape) | Wendi Dragonfire, wendi-dragonfire.com | Sydney Kopp-Richardson Urban Policy Analysis M.A. Candidate, Milano the New School for Management and Public Policy Research Assistant, Social Justice Initiatives | Radha McAlpine | Desi K. Robinson, Executive Producer, *Women in the Making: Tomorrow's History Today* | Laura E. Polk, Anthropologist, Washington, D.C. | Sfirah Madrone, Olympia, WA | AF3IRM | Rev. Raedorah C. Stewart, MA aka RevSisRaedorah, Queer Womanist Scholar Poet Mother | Jacqueline A. Gross, Oakland, CA | Devorah Hill, Media Educator, Manhattan Neighborhood Network, New York City | Elizabeth Lipton, Member, Pitzer College Feminist Coalition | Robin Morgan | Charlene Sayo, Member National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada | Elizabeth C. Yeampierre, Esq, Executive Director, UPROSE | Mandy Van Deven, Writer, Speaker, Changemaker | Wendy Ruiz | Hortensia Gooding, Vocalist, Administrator | Carol Griffin | Karynna A. Lynne, Lancaster Pennsylvania | Idrissa Simmonds, Writer and Educator | Ginnette Powell | Sydette Harry, Blackamazon, New York, NY | Susan Brison, Author, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* | Yolanda M. Carrington, Activist, Durham, NC | Christine Barksdale, Owner - Sustainable Passion - Women-centric Erotic Boutique and Investigator, Ithaca Police Department | Taja Lindley, *Colored Girls Hustle*, Brooklyn, NY | Tesa Johnson Ferrell Jones, Vice-President, Metro State Student Government Assembly 2011-2012, AMSA National Gender & Sexuality and Women's Grassroots, Regional Coordinator,

2011-2012 | Jeannette Bronson, Black Lesbians United Co-Founder | Dr. Blair LM Kelley, Associate Professor of History, North Carolina State University | subRosa art collective (Faith Wilding and Hyla Willis) | Valerie Ann, Johnson, Ph.D., Mott Distinguished Professor of Women's Studies and Director, Africana Women's Studies, Bennett College for Women, Greensboro NC | Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre, London, ON Canada | Girls Education and Mentoring Services (GEMS) | Natassja Gunasena | Pat Gargaetas, Your SillySister, PGar | Mandy | Amy Walls | Tatiana Ray, San Francisco, CA | Tatiana Ray, San Francisco, CA | Makeda Martin, Vancouver, Canada | Elisa Schmelkes | Sekile Nzinga-Johnson | Kate Ferguson, Editor-in-Chief, Real Health Magazine | Rais Neza Boneza | Allison Tucker | Diane Sharif, PMP®, IBM Certified Sr Project Manager, IBM People Manager, Integrated Cross-Service Line Delivery | Sonya M. Toler - former Executive Director of the PA Governor's Advisory Commission on African American Affairs and incest & rape survivor | An'Drea Hall, senior double-majoring in Criminology and Criminal Justice and Sociology, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIUC) | Dayanara Marte, Executive Director, Casa Atabex Ache, The House of Womyn's Power--La Casa del Poder de La Mujer | Maksim Bugro, Mora Media Management - Lighting Design, College Policy Debater for East Los Angeles College 09-11, and Cal State Fullerton 11-Present | Susanna Reid, PhD, ND, Sandoval Melim, PhD, DrPH, ND, Honolulu, HI | Jasmine Burnett and Trust Black Women | Brittney Glass | Patty Wetterling, Program Director, Sexual Violence Prevention, Minnesota Department of Health | Greer Schoeman, Capacity Building and Outreach Coordinator, SANAC Women's Sector Secretariat | Patricia E. Gary, Detroit, MI | Kadihija Kelly, MSE, Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs, Community Education Coordinator & Outreach Advocate | Rejané Claasen, Toronto, ON | Carol Corgan | Andrea Barrow, New York, NY | Annika Leonard, Survivor of Sexual Assault, Daughter and Mother | Betty T | Angelita Velasco, Jackson, MI | Dr. Gloria J. Johnson, CEO, Life Source Consultants, St. Louis, Missouri | Heidi Williamson, SPARK RJ Now! | Monica Simpson | Jean Richards | Yasmin A. Sayyed, Ed.D. | Kim Dartez, Director of Family Tree Healthcare and Chair of Women of Color Committee for the Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence | Shemeka Brand | Faith Bowman | Patricia Gray Chef/Caterer | Asha Family Services, Inc. Milwaukee, WI | Alkia L. Washington, VP of Finance, National Communication Association Student Club, University of Florida | Keleigh D. Felder | Dr. Yasmin A. Sayyed, Ed.D, Iwa Rere Arts, South Lake Tahoe, CA | The Audre Lorde Project | Rukshana Afia | Latoya Harrison | Kenya Lynn Murray | New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault | Victoria McWane-Creek | Deon Haywood, Women With A Vision, Inc | Phyllis Seven Harris | Aura Bogado | Aisha Josina Jean-Baptiste, MHP and Reproductive Health Educator | Sur Rodney (Sur), archivist | AT2W- S. Alexandryte | Julian Real, A

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